

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
November 14 & 15, 2002**

The regular meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 1:30 p.m., on November 14, 2002, in Room 1D2 of the Transportation Building in Olympia, Washington.

Commissioners present were: Aubrey Davis, Ed Barnes, Elmira Forner, George Kargianis, A. Michèle Maher, Chris Marr and Connie Niva.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Barnes and seconded by Commissioner Maher, to approve the minutes of the September 25, 2002 and October 16, 2002 Commission meetings. The motion was approved unanimously.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY REPORT

Secretary MacDonald pointed out that the passage of Initiative 776 would reduce the funding for the 2001-2003 and 2003-2005 budgets. The Department has developed possible program adjustment options to the current project lists for the two biennia, which will be presented to the Commission at a future meeting. Paula Hammond, Chief of Staff, Washington State Department of Transportation, reviewed the draft project list with the Commission. Commissioner Marr expressed his concern that SR 16/I-5 and SR 16/36th Street to Tacoma Narrows Bridge HOV lanes should not be cut, as citizens using the bridge are required to pay a toll to cross the bridge, and should have the HOV lanes. The Commission requested that two HOV projects on SR 16 be removed from the “cut list,” the rationale being that the individuals using the Tacoma Narrows Bridge will be paying tolls for the new bridge, and should receive the full benefit of the HOV lanes they will be paying for (on the bridge). The Department will reexamine its project list to find substitutes for the two HOV projects.

Secretary MacDonald shared a new set of web pages that will be placed on the Department’s web site. The web pages will provide complete report details on the results of the 2002 construction season. The focus of the report is regarding how well the Department met the budget, the schedule of each project, and the scope of the project, though the Department takes into consideration other factors during construction, such as convenience to the public.

MOVING FORWARD FROM THE OUTCOME OF REFERENDUM 51: THE STATE TRANSPORTATION BUDGET

Secretary MacDonald recommended that the Commission and Department develop a new transportation revenue and expenditure plan for consideration by the Governor and the Legislature. He explained that under the current law funding scenario, the state would drop to 49th (by 2004) among all the states in capital investment in the transportation system. A ten-year investment plan should be proposed to strategically address the transportation needs of the state. He pointed out that under current law funding for the next ten years, there will be \$4.8 billion in 18th Amendment related funds for highway and ferry investment, \$0.3 billion of flexible funds for rail and passenger only ferries, \$7.6 billion for city and county investment, and \$7.9 billion for local transit, Sound Transit and the Monorail. Using the 18th Amendment funds, the Department could afford to preserve about 80 percent of the asphalt pavement at the lowest life cycle cost, but the “white pavement” concrete on the interstates could not be rebuilt. The east half of the Hood Canal Bridge could be funded, and 95 percent of the remaining bridges and structures would be preserved. Only \$1.1 billion would be available for highway improvements, compared to \$5.0 billion in the previous ten years. Investment in new ferries would have to wait at least seven years. This would mean that Washington State would rank almost at the bottom of the 50 states at about \$80 per person, per year in roadway capital investment.

Secretary MacDonald offered three funding level scenarios as examples of different levels of investment above what the current law revenues might produce, and provided examples of the types of revenue sources that might be used to increase available funds for investment. He recommended that the Commission conduct a public outreach program to determine what the public would support, both in the type and amount of investment to be made, and the sources and levels of revenue to be raised. Secretary MacDonald stated that there needs to be a balance in transportation investment between state and local governments, and that transit investment opportunity depends on voters. He explained that cities and counties have a variety of taxes that are spent for transportation purposes in partnership with the Department. Federal transportation expenditures are enormous and the Department may be being optimistic in believing that the federal highway program funding will remain the same or increase in the future. The current highway preservation program in the State of Washington is very cost effective, but the distribution of funds that needs to ensure bridge seismic retrofitting may reduce the preservation program. Secretary MacDonald stated that the Department welcomes performance audits by consultants that have the knowledge and ability to provide recommendations for the Department to improve efficiencies and focus on strengths that may increase the Department's accountability. Public trust is based on facts that the public receives, and the Department is providing the facts on its website, as well as in the Gray Notebook.

The Commission accepted Secretary MacDonald's recommendation, and asked him to develop and implement a work plan that would involve the Commission and the Department in an outreach effort that would result in a plan to be presented to the Governor and Legislature.

It was moved by Commissioner Niva and seconded by Commissioner Barnes, that the Commission and Secretary seek public comments regarding the Straight Talk presentation in order to support the Commission in preparing options for the Legislature. The motion was unanimously approved.

Commissioner Davis commented that the Department should communicate with the public about individual projects rather than using the phrase "mega projects", which implies resolving entire corridors at once. Commissioner Niva requested that the Department focus on reducing the expense side of funding as well as increasing the revenue side. Commissioner Marr commented that funding should be scaled to the needs of the area that is funded. Commissioner Forner commented that voters need to be reached at the local level in order to find out what the most important thing is to the public. The Department needs to rely more on local funding for projects in specific areas. Commissioner Barnes commented that the public needs to receive accurate information from the Department and Commission. Commissioner Kargianis suggested that the Commission work toward the elimination of congestion, and that tolling should be considered for raising additional funding. Commissioner Maher commented that the whole state focus on multiple means of paying for projects. Rural areas need to look at different ways of funding projects.

CENTRAL PUGET SOUND HOV SYSTEM EVALUATION

Charlie Howard summarized the findings from the HOV lanes variable hours of operation evaluation. Conclusions from the evaluation found that HOV lanes are working well and improving freeway efficiency during the peak periods. He proposed that the Commission request public comment on a plan to keep the I-5 HOV lanes as HOV lanes during all days and all hours, but to open the HOV lanes to general purpose traffic on I-405, SR 167, I-90 east of I-405, and SR 520 east of I-405 at night from 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., seven days a week. The recommendation also included seeking federal funding to examine the feasibility of utilizing the HOV lanes on I-405 and SR 167 as high occupancy toll lanes (HOT lanes) to improve freeway throughput. The Commission requested the Department seek public comment regarding the recommendations until January 3rd. The Commission will make a final decision regarding the recommended policy change at its January meeting. Dan Mathis, Federal Highways Administration (FHWA), commented that the FHWA has safety and enforcement concerns if the Department does change the HOV lane hours of operation to part-time.

Commissioners commented on the estimated cost of signage and safety improvements to accommodate the changes to the hours of operation for HOV lanes. It was suggested that the Department seek a more cost effective method and provide detailed information to the Commission. Commissioner Davis noted that the Commission has received letters of concern regarding the HOV hours of operation proposed changes from Mayor Greg Nickels, City of Seattle, Mayor Connie Marshall, City of Bellevue; Mayor Larry Springer, City of Kirkland; the Metropolitan King County Council members, Mayor Pete Lewis, City of Auburn; Mayor Frank Anderson, City of Everett; Mayor Rosemarie Ives, City of Redmond; Puget Sound Regional Council members; and the Washington State Transit Association.

It was moved by Commissioner Niva and seconded by Commissioner Marr that HOV lane usage recommendations be presented for public comment. The motion was unanimously approved.

PRESENTATION OF THE GRAY NOTEBOOK

Daniela Bremmer, Director of Strategic Assessment and staff presented the 7th edition of the Gray Notebook, covering the quarter ending September 30, 2002. The purpose of the Gray Notebook is to report a variety of performance measures for review by the Commission and others. The worker safety report indicated that highway maintenance worker injuries are slightly lower, highway engineer injuries have increased over the past three years, and the number of ferry vessel workers injured is slightly higher than last year. The Department continues to provide safety training for workers, and has begun a program to define new injured worker return-to-work procedures to reduce lost days from work. A quarterly update on the Highway Construction Program indicated that the Department is meeting the planned advertisement date for over 90 percent of the projects that are being advertised for bids. The highway construction program cash flow expenditures through the quarter ending September 30, 2002, are on target, achieving approximately 96 percent of the projected budget cash flow. The Department advertised for bids on 19 projects, opened 18 bids and awarded 18 highway construction projects. The Commute Reduction Program quarterly report indicated that the Department's efforts to optimize the efficiency of highway systems shows an overall decline in the number of vanpools of 1.4 percent since January 2002. During the second quarter of 2002, automobiles used 78 percent of the almost 8,000 parking spaces in 31 WSDOT lots in King County - a significant decline from the previous quarter. This decline was paralleled in other parts of the commute network. The decline appears to reflect regional employment conditions. Ms. Bremmer provided an update on state-supported Amtrak Cascades services. Ridership has increased 2.3 percent over the same time period in 2001. Total ridership exceeds the 2001 level by 5.5 percent. Commissioner Niva commented that the Gray Notebook has been an invaluable tool to the Commission's ability to perform oversight of the Department.

John Milton, Assistant State Design Engineer, stated that data for the year 2001 proved to be positive for the State of Washington regarding highway safety performance. The tracking of highway fatalities and the causes of accidents helped determine strategies for enforcement and for highway improvements, as well as to reinforce "safe driving" messages for the public.

Toby Rickman, State Traffic Engineer, stated that the Department's "Click-It or Ticket" campaign has contributed to increased use of seatbelts through television advertisements and high visibility of the Washington State Patrol. The quarterly update for the expanded Incident Response Program indicated that WSDOT's strategy for clearing incidents from highways in less time has proven to be effective by the using roving trucks during peak traffic periods to clear traffic incidents.

Laura Meritt, Interactive Communications Manager, provided a report to the Commission regarding the Department's new traveler information system that serves taxpayers' convenience and safety. It improves traveler choices by providing information on traffic congestion, incidents and delays and ferry schedules through message signboards, traffic cameras, highway advisory radio transmitters, dial-up telephone service and the Department's website.

Rico Baroga, Maintenance Accountability Process Manager, gave the quarterly report regarding highway maintenance. In preparation for winter highway maintenance, the Department is implementing the salt pilot project. Over the last 15 years salt application techniques have become more sophisticated. This allows for less salt to be applied to the highways and results in less corrosion to vehicles. The project will be monitored closely through the winter. The Department has disseminated information regarding the project to the media and will post signs at rest areas on passes indicating to motorists that they have traveled through an area where the highway has been salted.

MULTIMODAL INVESTMENT CHOICE ANALYSIS (MICA)

Ashley Probart, Transportation Planning Manager, briefed the Commission regarding the lack of funding to proceed with the implementation of the Efficiency Act (ESHB 2304). The bill called for development of an analytic tool using a common methodology to measure benefits and costs of all modes. The Department had planned on using the Multimodal Investment Choice Analysis (MICA) tool to meet the requirements of the statute. Mr. Probart recommended that the Department focus on identifying the differences between modal programs in determining cost/benefit ratios, and work to reconcile those differences. The Department would not attempt further development of the MICA computer program. Upon direction from the Commission there would be a two or three biennia phase-in of the cost benefit analysis. Building a consensus among modes to address identified differences will also address the differences to be reconciled and new cost benefit calculations to be incorporated into future program management structure. The Commission agreed with the recommendation, but asked Mr.

Probart to return in January with an assessment regarding how long it would take to identify and reconcile the differences in cost-benefit analysis.

HIGHWAY SAFETY REPORT

Brian Ziegler, Director, Maintenance and Operations, briefed the Commission regarding the policies and practices used to protect workers and the traveling public in highway work zones. He pointed out that driver behavior continues to be the primary factor in accidents in work zones. Primary work zone challenges are worker safety, driver safety and traffic and work hazard. The Department has done much to improve driver safety issues by adding advanced warning signs, mobile operations and enforcement and education. The Department relies heavily on technology such as the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to assist in preventing worker and driver injuries on highways. The future in safety is using protective and warning equipment, new work methods for workers, and enforcement and education to the public. Some of the challenges in the future for work zone safety and driver mobility are traffic delay and highway congestion. He also reported on the Incident Response Program, which has received very positive reviews from the individuals receiving the service. A partnership initiated by Shell and Fisher broadcasting, sponsors of one WSDOT incident response truck, has the benefit of a media program sponsored by Shell. As a result of the partnership the Department receives visibility and the public receives another source of traffic information. Matt Enders, Manager, Corridor Safety Program, gave a presentation regarding the Corridor Safety Program. The Department's Corridor Safety Program and its partners won a Governor's Award for Quality. The joint program includes the Department, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission along with the Washington State Patrol and other state and local agencies. The objective of the program is to reduce collisions and directly target the causes of collisions on a corridor by corridor basis, starting with the worst roadways first. Some of the challenges faced are recruiting local groups for each corridor and very little funding allowing for low-cost solutions only.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

Paul Locke, citizen, commented that at one time the Commission was implementing laws that were driving up the cost of projects. He expressed his belief that the cost of projects needs to be kept in control by paying contractors as portions of the projects are completed. Mr. Locke stated the cost of projects needs to be decreased.

Mike Doubleday, City of Bellevue, referred to a letter written to the Commission by Connie Marshall, Mayor of Bellevue, regarding a change in HOV operation hours for I-405 through the City of Bellevue. The City is concerned about the cost of opening the HOV lanes and the impact the policy change will have on the direct access ramp operations. He commented that the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) might not allow the access ramps to be open to general-purpose traffic. If buses are not allowed to use the ramps it would create problems for the City of Bellevue.

Kevin Shively, Transportation Choices Coalition, stated that the Coalition believes that a compromise plan must be developed to replace the Referendum 51 proposal. It must be balanced and the mega projects should be terminated. He also stated that opening the HOV system to general-purpose travel would not work. He commented that voters want to improve safety, reduce traffic delay and provide more choices within the budget of a 10-year transportation package. Additional transportation choices are a very effective investment and also very much needed.

Meta Heller, Chair, Common Ground USA, stated that a new revenue proposal should balance the cost of investment between passenger vehicle owners, trucks owners and transit riders. She expressed the opinion that transportation funding should be determined by an objective process rather than based on political influence of participants.

Lloyd Flem, Executive Director, Washington State Association of Rail Passengers, stated that the Association supported Referendum 51. Mr. Flem commented that he feels a balance of modes is the appropriate choice for preparing a transportation package.

Don Briscoe, representing Local 17 of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, stated that the members of the Federation are feeling the impact of the defeat of Referendum 51. He stated that the Federation is willing to work with transportation leadership to get a funding proposal passed. He expressed the Federation's opposition to the recent change in Department policy regarding Reduction-In-Force(RIF).

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM DELIVERY REPORT

Greg Selstead, Manager, Program Delivery, reported expenditures of the first five quarters of the biennium in the area of funds expended and projects advertised on time. Expenditures through the quarter ending September 30, 2002 are on target, achieving approximately 96 percent of budgeted cash flow. The expenditure rate slightly exceeds historical levels and reflects the high delivery rate of projects to advertisement in the highway improvement program. The Improvement Program is driving the current expenditure levels. Specifically, the Mobility Improvement, Safety Improvement and Economic Initiative subprograms have seen aggressive spending levels through the first five quarters of the biennium. He also reported that ten projects originally scheduled for advertisement were deferred, for a variety of reasons, including reduction of funding, environmental issues and design or scope issues. He pointed out that in the previous year's report, over 40 projects were delayed; an indication that the Department has improved its management of the projects during the past year. He explained that expenditures would require careful attention and management to the year-end in order to bring projects to completion within budget.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Maher stated that she attended the Tri Cities RTPO meeting that focused on light rail transportation in the area. She also attended a ribbon cutting at Liberty Lake, and attended the Chehalis local Commission meeting.

Commissioner Forner stated that she attended the HOV conference in Seattle. She commented that the conference was very informative. She attended the Washington Economic Development Association conference in Vancouver. She also attended the Puget Sound Freight Mobility Roundtable meeting, and found useful information regarding how the economy affects the ports in Washington State.

Commissioner Marr commented on his involvement with the Downtown Spokane Partnership that is addressing funding possibilities for a study of the I-90 Corridor. Continued population growth and increased vehicle volume in the Spokane area has added increased pressure to the I-90 Viaduct. Commissioner Marr stated that the Department should assume the lead role in the study.

Commissioner Niva stated that she attended the HOV conference in Seattle. She felt that the conference was very informative and valuable as a lessons learned tool after hearing other states' HOV experiences. She commented that she participated in a panel discussion for the American Society of Public Administration at Seattle University. The panel discussed transportation issues and the impact of initiatives.

Commissioner Barnes stated that he attended the Washington Economic Development Association conference in Vancouver and found it to be very beneficial. He attended the presentation to Governor Locke and Governor Kitzhaber on the I-5 Partnership in Vancouver. He also attended the SR 500/192nd Street interchange ribbon cutting. He commented on how interesting the Chehalis local meeting was.

Commissioner Kargianis stated that he has spent a great deal of time talking to community leaders and constituents regarding Referendum 51. He commented that the Regional Transportation Investment District is researching how funds can be raised at a local level to address traffic congestion regionally.

Commissioner Davis expressed his congratulations to Secretary MacDonald, who was named leader of the year by the Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m. on November 15, 2002.